Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Serve Washington Request for Grant Applications
AmeriCorps State Formula Grant
Federal Fiscal Year 2015
CFDA 94-006

(Information current as of March 13, 2015)

Q&A from March 9, 2015

1. My organization only wants one or two AmeriCorps members. Should I apply for this Request for Grant Applications?

No. This grant solicitation is only for programs that propose to engage a team of 15-25 Members Service Years in their program. A Member Service Year (MSY) is similar to the concept of a Full-Time Employee (FTE). For example, two half-time members are equal to one full-time MSY.

If your organization is interested in hosting less than 15 MSYs, for example a single independent placement AmeriCorps member or a smaller AmeriCorps team, you may wish to contact an AmeriCorps program in your area or a statewide intermediary to determine if a partnership may be feasible. Refer to the AmeriCorps Program Directory for a listing of programs in your county. If your organization is looking for AmeriCorps VISTA opportunities, please refer to the CNCS VISTA website.

2. Is the 15-25 MSY requirement over the course of the 3 year application period, or is the requirement for 15-25 MSYs per year?

Serve Washington requires that grant applications be a minimum of 15-25 MSYs per program year.

3. How do I know if I apply to the standard cost-reimbursement prime application or the fixed-amount prime application?

All NEW Serve Washington applicants must apply as a standard cost-reimbursement application. (Unless your program is a NEW Education Award Only Program (EAP) – EAP programs apply under the fixed cost application.)

Recompeting applicants previously awarded under the fixed-amount model or recompeting applicants who have discussed switching to the fixed-amount model with Serve Washington may apply as a fixed-amount application.

4. In the NOFO there is a requirement to submit a letter of intent. As an applicant, am I required to submit a letter of intent to Serve Washington or to the Corporation for National and Community Service?

No. Applicants are not required to submit letters of intent or concept papers to Serve Washington or to the Corporation.

5. Can we submit letters of support to help strengthen our application?

No. Serve Washington will not require letters of support for the Formula competition.

6. For my project award period, should I consider anything beyond the start date and end date for my members?

Yes. The project award period is one full year, generally the 1st of the month through the last day of the 12th month. Within that year, the start and end dates for members may vary. It may be appropriate to have a buffer before and after members' terms of service.

Project Period Example: August 1, 2015 – July 30, 2016
Member Service Year Example: August 15, 2015 – June 30, 2016

7. What is the earliest or latest date a project award period can start?

The earliest project award period allowed is August 1, 2015 – July 30, 2016. The latest project award period allowed is January 1, 2016 – December 31, 2016.

8. My organization is in a continuation year, may we request additional members or additional funds?

Serve Washington does not encourage currently-funded programs in a continuation year to request additional members or additional funds without first having a discussion with your Program Officer.

Continuation grantees may increase their requested cost per MSY due to the CNCS increase in the minimum living allowance for PY15-16. However, the requested increase cannot be more than the living allowance increase itself, which is $430 per MSY. See page 17 of the NOFO for the minimum and maximum living allowance requirement.

9. Is an applicant that is a community or faith-based organization also required to hold 501(c)(3) status in order to be considered eligible to apply?

No. The Corporation does not require 501(c)(3) approval as long as your organization is recognized as a nonprofit organization by your state.

10. In the Program Design section of the application, there is a section on Problem/Need. Can you explain the distinction between problem and need?

The problem is the negative condition that exists in the service area that you are proposing, while the need explains the scope, significance, and cause of the problem. The problem/need statement answers questions such as: who's affected, how many, how severe, it answers the question "so what," what will likely happen if nothing is done, and finally why does it exist and how is it perpetuated. The problem/need statement should also reflect statistics and data sources that are reputable, current, and local.

11. Where can I find additional information and resources on logic models, performance measurement/theory of change, and evaluation?

Applicants can find additional resources on the bottom of the Serve Washington grant information page.

12. I am having a technical difficulty with the performance measure module in eGrants. What should I do?

For technical questions about eGrants, please contact the eGrants Help Desk at 1-800-942-2677 or by submitting a question to the CNCS Help Desk here.

13. Is an evaluation plan required for first-time applicants?

No. First-time applicants are not required to submit an evaluation plan. First-time applicants can select the "not applicable" option in eGrants for this question.

14. Am I required to submit a labor union concurrence form? (see also Page 9 of the Application Instructions)

It depends on the following:
1) If a program applicant:
   a) Proposes to serve as the placement site for AmeriCorps members; and
   b) Has employees engaged in the same or substantially similar work as that proposed to be carried out by AmeriCorps members; and
   c) Those employees are represented by a local labor organization, then the application must include the written concurrence of the local labor organization representing those employees. Written concurrence can be in the form of a letter or e-mail from the local union leadership.
2) If a program applicant:
   a) Proposes to place AmeriCorps members at sites where they will be engaged in the same or substantially similar work as employees represented by a local labor organization, then the applicant must submit a written description of how it will ensure that:
      i) AmeriCorps members won't be placed in positions that were recently occupied by paid staff.
      ii) No AmeriCorps member will be placed into a position for which a recently resigned or discharged employee has recall rights as a result of a collective

bargaining agreement, from which a recently resigned or discharged employee was removed as a result of a reduction in force, or from which a recently resigned/discharged employee is on leave or strike.

For the purposes of this section, "program applicant" includes any applicant to CNCS or a State Commission, as well as any entity applying for assistance or approved national service positions through a CNCS grantee or subgrantee.

If either 1) or 2) above applies to you, please select "Enter New," name the new document 1) "Labor Union Concurrence," or 2) "Displacement Assurance" and select "Sent." If a labor union concurrence is required of the applicant, the applicant is required to submit the letter of concurrence to Serve Washington by the application due date. Materials should be sent to servewa@ofm.wa.gov

15. In the "Funding/Demographics" section of the application there is a question related to episodic volunteers and the number of ongoing volunteers generated by volunteers. Are these requirements of the AmeriCorps program?

Yes. AmeriCorps programs and members are expected to build community capacity through generating volunteers throughout the program year.

16. How are childcare and the education award budgeted for in the applicant's application?

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides childcare benefits (as eligible) and education awards to members at no cost to the applicant/program. Do not budget for these expenses.

17. Can the CNCS award be spread over other costs than just the living allowance?

Yes. CNCS does not designate which program expenses must be paid out of the federal portion. Programs can determine what portions of the total budget are paid from the federal share and what portions are paid from the grantee share.

18. Page 11 of the Application Instructions states that fixed amount "Grantees pay all program costs over the maximum $13,000 per MSY provided by CNCS." Is this a typo? Because the maximum cost per MSY is different in the NOFO than it is in the Instructions.

We have noted the discrepancy in the cost per MSY (this discrepancy is also found on page 34 of the Application Instructions as well). This is a typo in the Instructions that we have noted to the Corporation. The correct maximum cost per MSY is $13,730 for cost reimbursement grantees and $13,430 for fixed amount grantees.

19. Page 24 of the Application Instructions under detailed budget instructions lists expected staff travel for State Commissions; are there similar expectations for subgrantees of Serve Washington?

Yes. While subgrantees are not expected to travel to Washington DC (that is the State Commissions role), program staff will be expected to travel to Serve Washington-sponsored technical assistance meetings.

Two primary in-person technical assistance meetings occur annually:
1) Serve Washington Subgrantee Meeting: it is best to plan for a two-day meeting in the Olympia/Seattle area; this meeting usually occurs in July.
2) Pacific Cluster Regional Conference: it is best to plan for a full week conference; this conference rotates dates and locations within the western United States. Previous conferences have been held in Portland, Oregon and Salt Lake City, Utah.

(New) **Q&A from March 13, 2015**

20. The applicant and application information section in eGrants (which feeds the face sheet) asks for "type" of application, where do I find more information on this?

In the application instructions, beginning on page 17, there are directions for completing the face sheet. Item #8 specifically addresses the directions for the type of application.

21. How can we illustrate the Theory of Change? Can we use a visual or does it need to be in the narrative sections?

Unfortunately, eGrants will not allow for any upload of visuals. Applicants will outline their theory of change in the narrative and will additionally use the logic model section of eGrants to reflect a quick snapshot of the theory of change. The logic model is a predetermined chart that presents as a visual. Information entered into the logic model can be short reflective statements or lists that present more like a visual than the full theory of change narrative.

22. Can we attach or send a visual directly to Serve Washington?

No. Visuals, flyers, etc., will not be accepted.

23. Our program is still determining the host sites in which members will serve at, how do we reflect this in the application?

Programs should outline their process for site selection and address any information that is known; such as geographical locations, target sites, number of sites, previous sites, etc.

24. How do we get to the grant application in eGrants?

Once you have followed the steps outlined in the RFGA to create an application, the application is then available for data entry under "view my grants/applications."

25. Our organization tracks more outputs and outcomes than are listed in our performance measures, how should we address this?

This is a program design question that must be addressed at the program level. However, it is noteworthy that the logic model represents the organizations total theory of change. Not all items listed in the logic model require an associated performance measure. Programs are only required to track one output and one aligned outcome within the total logic model.

26. The legal applicant is a school district. What eligible entity would this fall under?

When filling out the applicant and application information in eGrants, you will have the ability to choose from a series of options. The first being local government, and the second being school (k-12). These options are described in the application instructions, page 17, item #7.

27. Can you speak further to the role of a multi-focus intermediary?

Programs must self-determine if their program design meets the definition of a multi-focus intermediary. The definition can be found in the NOFO Glossary, page 4.